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Examining Visitor Attitudes Toward the Proposed Greater Canyonlands National Monument: A Visitor Survey in Utah's Indian Creek Corridor

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Introduction

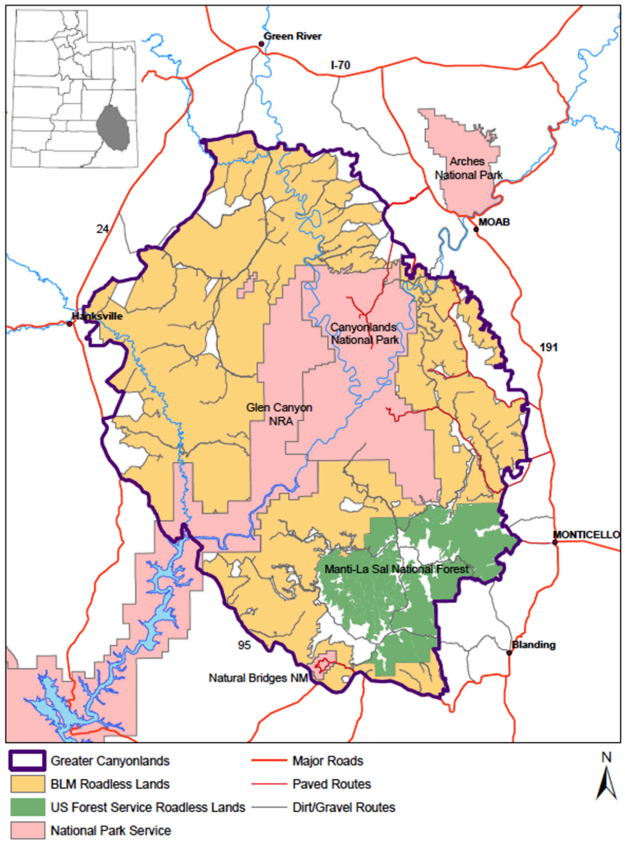
In August of 2012, the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) sent a letter that was backed by over 100 outdoor retailers to President Barack Obama. This letter asked the President to use his authority granted by the Antiquities Act of 1906 to proclaim a 1.4 million acre National Monument in southeastern Utah (OIA, 2014). The proposed Greater Canyonlands National Monument (GCNM) would surround the already present Canyonlands National Park, and include federally owned public lands from five Utah counties (Emery, Garfield, Grand, San Juan, and Wayne).

As stated by the OIA, the purpose of the GCNM would be to protect the Greater Canyonlands region from oil and gas drilling, mining, and off-road vehicle use in an effort to enhance and preserve the quality of outdoor recreation (OIA, 2014).

This proposal stirred a deep-rooted and enduring debate over what should be done with Utah's iconic public lands, and there is much debate over whether the GCNM should be proclaimed by President Obama. The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of recreationists visiting the Greater Canyonlands region, specifically the Indian Creek Corridor, in an attempt to gauge how they feel about the proposed GCNM.

Study Methods

Data were gathered by administering visitor intercept surveys in the Indian Creek Corridor (ICC) during the spring of 2013. This area was chosen because it lies within the boundary of the proposed GCNM, and it is a popular recreation destination for rock climbers, sightseers, people driving for pleasure, campers, hikers, and off-road vehicle enthusiasts (BLM, 2008). Four survey locations were



Map of the Proposed GCNM
Greater Canyonlands Map. (2014). Retrieved: September 2, 2014. From: greater-canyonlands.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/GreaterCanyonlands_Map.pdf

Table 1: Percentage of Indian Creek Corridor Recreationists Who Agree or Disagree with National Monument Statements

Statements	Agree [a]	Disagree [b]	Unsure
A. Designating Greater Canyonlands a 'national monument' would be important for protecting the natural environment	63.7	13.2	23
B. The process of designating the GCNM, the management of it, and the land that would be included in it should be agreed upon by all stakeholders before it is designated	73.7	5.6	20.1
C. Local citizens should have more influence in the designation and management of national monuments	59.8	21.4	21.6
D. More national monuments should be established on federal lands	49.5	12.9	37.5
E. The GCNM should be designated	40.3	12.1	47.6
F. The GCNM designation would enhance the quality of outdoor recreation in the Indian Creek Corridor	37.4	17.4	45.2
G. If the GCNM is designated, it will have a negative impact on the lifestyles of local residents	13.2	25.8	61.1
H. The GCNM would stimulate the economies of surrounding communities	40.9	11.4	47.8

[a] "Agree" includes Strongly Agree and Agree. [b] "Disagree" includes Strongly Disagree and Disagree.
N = 336

chosen within the ICC in an attempt to capture the diverse use that occurs there: Newspaper Rock Historic Site; Super Crack/Battle of the Bulge Buttress parking lot; Cottonwood Canyon Road; and Hamburger Rock Road. Dates and times to survey these four locations were chosen at random.

The survey instrument covered 1) respondents' demographic information, 2) respondents' place of residence, 3) respondents' visitation history, 4) respondents' recreational activity in the ICC, 5) respondents' prior knowledge of the proposed GCNM, 6) attitudes toward the GCNM, 7) attitudes toward the management of the Greater Canyonlands area, 8) respondents' environmental orientation, and 9) respondents' degree of place dependence and place identity.

Three hundred and thirty-nine surveys were completed (N = 339).

Results

Who is visiting the Indian Creek Corridor?

Of the 339 people surveyed, 46 (13.5%) were foreign visitors who traveled to the ICC from outside of the United States. The remaining 293 (86.4%) were resident visitors who lived in the United States. The mean distance traveled to the ICC by residents was 648 miles, and the median distance was 428 miles. The maximum distance traveled to the ICC by residents was 2559 miles, and the minimum distance traveled was from the nearby town of Monticello, UT (27 miles). Only 12 respondents (3.5%) were from communities that surround Greater Canyonlands (Moab, La Sal, Monticello, and Blanding), and traveled fewer than 60 miles to reach the ICC. This illustrates that the majority of visitors traveled long distances to recreate in the ICC. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the results of this study reflect visitors who traveled long distances, not visitors who live in surrounding communities.

The main recreational activity respondents were participating in was rock climbing (55.2%), followed by hiking/walking (20.4%), camping (8%), ATV riding (4.9%), and driving for pleasure (4.6%).

There was a high degree of return visitation; nearly half (48.1%) of the respondents had visited the ICC before. Of the respondents who had visited before, 60.7% had been visiting the ICC for one to five years, 34.1% had been visiting for six to 20 years, and 5.2% had been visiting for more than 20 years. The majority (70.1%) of respondents visit one to two times per year, 14.6% visit three to four times per year, and 15.2% visit more than five times per year.

Most respondents (71.7%) were between the ages of 20 to 39. More males (59%) were surveyed than females (40.7%), and the majority of respondents (71.8%) had at least a four year college degree.

How do visitors feel about the proposed Greater Canyonlands National Monument?

There was generally high agreement (63.7%) among visi-

Table 2: Percentage of Indian Creek Corridor Recreationists Who Agree or Disagree with Management and Threat Statements Regarding the Greater Canyonlands Region

Statements	Agree [a]	Disagree [b]	Unsure
A. There should be fewer regulations on off-road vehicle use in the Greater Canyonlands area	10.3	70	19.3
B. Mining for minerals is a major threat to the Greater Canyonlands area	64.3	7.5	28.3
C. Livestock grazing is a threat to the Greater Canyonlands area	32	32.6	35.5
D. Hunting is a threat to the Greater Canyonlands area	27.3	37.2	35.4
E. Traditional energy development (drilling for oil and gas) should still be allowed in the Greater Canyonlands area	13	69.1	17.8
F. Alternative energy development (solar and wind) should take place in the Greater Canyonlands area	43.7	24.2	32.1

[a] "Agree" includes Strongly Agree and Agree. [b] "Disagree" includes Strongly Disagree and Disagree.
N = 336

tors that designating the GCNM would be important for protecting the natural environment, and nearly half said there should be more national monuments on federal lands. However, a substantial percentage of visitors were unsure (47.6%) if the GCNM should be designated.

Visitors were also highly unsure of what kinds of effects the GCNM would have on recreation and local residents in the Greater Canyonlands region. Visitors did display a high level of agreement that local citizens should have more influence in the designation and management of national monuments (59.8%). The highest level of visitor agreement (73.7%) was that before the GCNM is proclaimed, all stakeholders should agree on the process by which the GCNM is designated, the management of the GCNM, and the land that would be included in the GCNM. Table 1 presents the percent of respondents who agreed, disagreed, or were unsure with national monument statements.

What do visitors perceive as threats to the Greater Canyonlands region?

Visitors had strong attitudes toward off-road vehicle use, mining, and traditional energy development in the Greater Canyonlands region. Seventy percent of respondents said there should not be fewer regulations on off-road vehicle use, 64.3% said mining for minerals is a major threat to the Greater Canyonlands area, and 69.1% said traditional energy development should no longer be allowed in the Greater Canyonlands region. Visitors expressed less strong views toward livestock grazing and hunting, and there was slightly higher agreement that alternative energy development should take place in the Greater Canyonlands area. Table 2 presents the percentages of people who agreed, disagreed, or were unsure with statements regarding management and threats.

Factors that influence people's attitudes toward the Greater Canyonlands National Monument

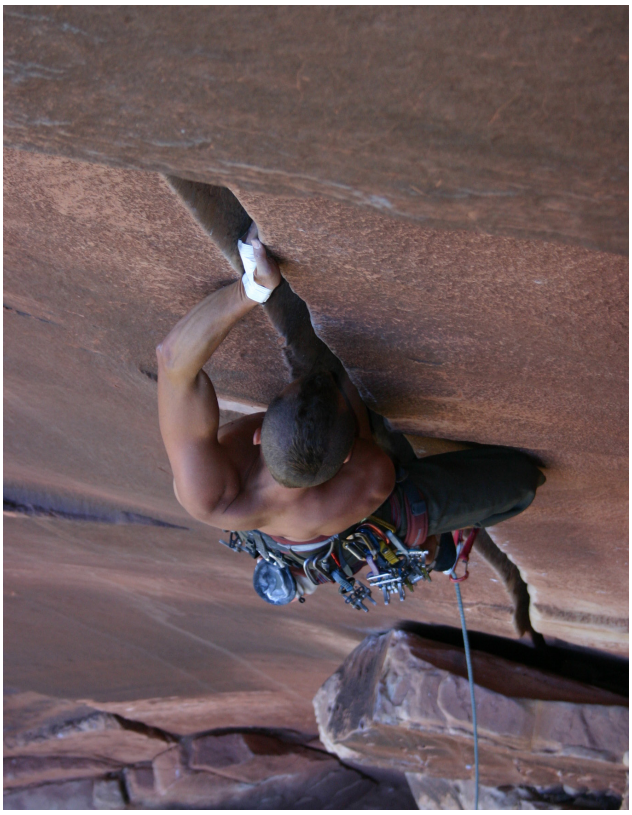
In an attempt to further understand respondents' attitudes toward the GCNM, linear regression models were used to see which factors related to their attitudes. This study tested to see how factors like where the respondents lived, their environmental orientation, and how they perceived threats to the Greater Canyonlands region affected their attitudes toward the GCNM.

Past research has found that people who live farther away from a protected area are more in favor of it because 1) they are less affected by its restrictions and 2) they are more opposed to the area's degradation (Badola, 1998; Heinen, 1993; Ite, 1996; Mehta & Heinen, 2001; Mkanda & Munthali, 1994). However, this study was unable to support that people who live farther away from the Greater Canyonlands area were more in favor of designating the GCNM ($\beta = .097$, $p = .083$). An explanation for these findings could be the sample used in this analysis only contained twelve individuals who lived within 60 miles of the ICC. Therefore, the sample did not capture the people who live in the Greater Canyonlands region, which are the same people who may have negative attitudes toward the GCNM because of the real and perceived impacts it would have.

Environmental orientation is a term used to describe how people view humans' role in the natural environment. Environmental orientation is measured on a scale, with one extreme being anthropocentrism, and the other being biocentrism. Gagnon-Thompson and Barton (1994) defined people who are biocentric as "individuals [who] value nature for its own sake and, therefore, judge that it deserves protection because of its intrinsic value" (p. 1). In contrast, the authors defined people who are anthropocentric as

individuals who feel "the environment… has value in maintaining or enhancing the quality of life for humans" (p. 1). This research did find a relationship between environmental orientation and attitudes toward the GCNM. For example, people who were more biocentric were more likely to think that designating the GCNM would be important for protecting the natural environment ($\beta = .124$, $p = .033$), and were more likely to think the GCNM should be designated ($\beta = .153$, $p = .013$). Because individuals who are more biocentric "value nature for its own sake" and "judge that it deserves protection because of its intrinsic value," it was expected to see that biocentric people were more likely to think the GCNM would be important for protecting the natural environment, and thought the GCNM should be designated.

This study also tested to see if there were any relationships between how people perceive public land uses and their attitudes toward the GCNM. Even though many respondents viewed mining for minerals and drilling for oil and gas as threats to the Greater Canyonlands area, there was no evidence to support that these same people thought the GCNM should be designated (mining $\beta = .099$, $p = .092$; drilling for oil and gas $\beta = -.112$, $p = .102$). However, respondents who thought there should not be fewer regulations on off-road vehicle use ($\beta = -.136$, $p = .025$), respondents who saw hunting as a threat to the Greater Canyonlands region ($\beta = .135$, $p = .015$), and respondents who thought the Greater Canyonlands region should be used for wind and solar energy development ($\beta = .170$, $p = .003$) were more likely to think the GCNM should be designated. Views toward off-road vehicle use were the most consistent predictors of attitudes toward national monuments and the GCNM. For example, individuals who thought there should be fewer regulations of off-road vehicle use were more likely to think local citizens should have more influence in the designation and management of national monument ($\beta = .226$, $p < .000$), and were also less likely to think the GCNM would be important for protecting the natural environment ($\beta = -.130$, $p = .025$). In contrast, visitors who thought there should not be fewer regulations on off-road vehicle use thought there should be more national monuments on federal lands ($\beta = -.177$, $p = .002$), thought the GCNM should be designated ($\beta = -.123$, $p = .033$), and were less likely to think the GCNM would have a negative impact on local residents ($\beta = .133$, $p = .029$).



An Indian Creek Corridor climber, ascending one of the region's most popular climbing routes.

Conclusion

Results of this study show that visitors were largely unsure if the GCNM should be proclaimed by President Obama. In addition, there was no evidence to support that people who perceive mining for minerals and drilling for oil and gas as threats were more likely to think the GCNM should be designated. Visitors highly agreed that if the GCNM is going to be designated, there should be agreement by all stakeholders over what land would be included in the monument, the process by which the monument would be designated, and the management of the monument after it is designated. Visitors were highly concerned about off-road vehicle use, mining, and oil/gas development in the Greater Canyonlands area, but data did not suggest that visitors preferred a quick national monument designation to mitigate real and perceived threats from off-road vehicles, mining, and oil/gas development in Greater Canyonlands.

Based on these findings, demonstrating the perspectives of ICC recreationists, it appears that President Obama should not proclaim the GCNM quickly with the stroke of his pen. Instead, data suggests a more preferred approach would be to include all stakeholders in a collaborative and transparent planning process focused on reaching compromises that reflect the diverse uses and values that are strongly tied to the southeastern Utah landscape. Currently, Congressmen Rob Bishop has been leading the Utah Public Land Initiative, which is focused on working collaboratively with stakeholders to reach compromises over contentious public land issues in southeastern Utah; and according to the findings of this study, this is the approach that is preferred by the majority of people who recreate in the Indian Creek Corridor of the proposed Greater Canyonlands National Monument.

Additional research on this subject should be focused on gaining a better understanding of the views of people who live in the communities that surround Greater Canyonlands, because this population was greatly underrepresented in this study. Such research should focus on gathering information that could be used to 1) define the preferred negotiating process for future public land decisions, 2) gain a better understanding of public land management preferences, and 3) define specific land areas and issues where compromises could be made by affected stakeholders before a president proclaims and designates the proposed GCNM in southeastern Utah.

Rudzitis and Johansen (1991) stated that if public land management does "not embrace the values of the public, conflicts surely will increase, and both the public and [public land management] agencies will be worse off." The public's "values" toward public land are diverse and complex, and it is hard to know how to effectively "embrace" them so conflict does not escalate to a point where both the people and the landscape suffer. Large decisions with respect to public land will never be without conflict. However, as the results of this study show, the preferred approach to public land decisions are to negotiate solutions that "embrace," as effectively as possible, the diverse "values of the public."

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